HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 143 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, September 20, 2018

Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

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● (1600)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): Order.

Colleagues, while Paul is handing out the last of the speaking notes, I would like to welcome everyone here. The meeting is now in public.

We have before us representatives from the Public Service Commission and the Treasury Board Secretariat, who will be providing a briefing to committee members on the challenges the federal government and the public service may be facing on the recruitment, hiring, and perhaps even retention of public service employees, particularly younger employees, because we do have an aging population not only in the general populace but also in our public service. This may be a very timely discussion.

I understand, Mr. Borbey, that you will be going first. I would ask you to please introduce your colleagues and make your opening statements. You will be followed by Mr. Trottier.

If you can keep your comments to about 10 minutes or less, that will allow committee members much more time to pose questions to all of you. Thank you again for being here.

Mr. Borbey, the floor is yours.

Mr. Patrick Borbey (President, Public Service Commission): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for your invitation to provide a briefing on the current state of public service hiring. You have rightfully honed in on a key issue, at least the way I was briefed: the length of time it takes to appoint someone to a job.

I'm pleased to be joined here today by Michael Morin, who is responsible for the staffing policy at the Public Service Commission, and Véronique Gaudreau, who is responsible for our central recruitment programs.

[*Translation*]

Canada's public service is built on the foundation of merit and non-partisanship. I am proud that the Public Service Commission has been safeguarding these two principles for over 110 years now. As you know, Canadians and governments alike have been well served by our professional public service. This is recognized here and abroad, with Canada's public service ranked first in last year's Civil Service Effectiveness Index.

One key aspect of public service hiring is that departments and agencies operate under a delegated model. Deputy heads are responsible for the hiring practices within their departments. They have a great deal of flexibility when it comes to how employees are hired. This is recognized in the Public Service Employment Act and in the Public Service Commission's policies and practices.

[*English*]

Reducing the time it takes to hire someone is something that I'm personally seized with and that the entire Public Service Commission is working on. In fact, the number of days to complete an external recruitment process is the very first indicator listed in our departmental plan.

Based on the most recent data, we have established that it takes, on average, 197 days to hire a new employee using an external advertised competitive process. This is from the time the opportunity is posted on our GC Jobs site to the day that employee reports to work. It includes such steps as second language testing and obtaining the necessary security clearances.

We can agree that 197 days is unacceptably long and that this makes for a frustrating experience for applicants, hiring managers and HR advisers alike. We lose many good candidates along the way, and positions remain unfilled for long periods, impacting service to Canadians.

I should clarify that this measurement does not apply to a number of other mechanisms, such as lateral moves, appointments from inventories, student hiring, non-advertised appointments, and appointments of individuals with priority such as our veterans, all of which are much quicker ways to hire.

[*Translation*]

Nonetheless, as we want to see more external staffing in the public service and to provide opportunities for the best and brightest from across the country, this is a baseline that we must and that we will significantly improve.

And I'm convinced, Mr. Chair, that we can modernize and speed up the hiring process while maintaining and in fact strengthening merit, transparency, fairness, diversity and regional representation. Flexibility, creativity and merit are not and cannot be seen as mutually exclusive.

[*English*]

Two years ago, we took important steps to reduce the administrative burden placed on departments and agencies when it came to staffing, with what we called, and still call, the new direction in staffing.

The number of Public Service Commission policies was reduced from 12 to one. We have encouraged departments and agencies to simplify their job ads. Deputy heads have been exercising their discretion to hire based on their own circumstances. We recognize that the employees needed to protect Canada's borders are different from those who work in a call centre or those working in a medical lab.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to hiring. However, hiring decisions continue to be based on merit and non-partisanship.

● (1605)

[*Translation*]

The cumbersome staffing culture that has developed over time will not change overnight, and it is something we are committed to improve in every way. There has been noticeable progress in many areas, but there is still much room for improvement when it comes to simplifying staffing and we will continue to exert our influence across the hiring system. For example, I have recently had discussions with some deputy heads who now consistently succeed in staffing positions externally in less than 100 days.

We know that the right policy framework and the commitment of deputy heads is not enough to turn this ship around. Not when we are relying on antiquated recruitment programs, tools and systems. Since my arrival at the Public Service Commission a year and a half ago, I have placed a priority on modernizing our recruitment toolkit starting with bringing GCJobs into the digital era.

[*English*]

We have engaged with job applicants, hiring managers and HR professionals from across the country to make sure their needs are understood and form the basis of changes we are making to tools, systems and procedures. The result we are seeking is leading-edge technologies based on user testing, user-centric design and modern prototype development.

This work has provided us with the detailed user requirements to allow us to move forward and start working on creating a modern, digital recruitment platform to replace the current system, which has been in use for decades. This includes improved communications with candidates and managers. It will be highly intuitive and easy to navigate. I'd like to think that it will be an experience much like that offered by large companies such as Amazon, which offer convenient, efficient and quick online shopping experiences. Imagine, for example, a "one-click apply" user experience.

[*Translation*]

We want a system where a candidate's profile—education, qualifications, official language results, confirmation of security levels and accommodation requirements—follow them so they don't need to provide it every single time they apply or are hired for a Government of Canada job.

A system where they apply once and the information submitted can be used multiple times for similar jobs.

A system that provides real-time regular feedback on the status of an application.

A system that provides hiring managers up-to-date labour market information, to help educate their choice of recruitment strategies.

A system that provides access to state-of-the-art assessment tools such as unsupervised Internet testing.

And one that is inclusive and accessible by design.

● (1610)

[*English*]

We are also experimenting at other points in the hiring process. For example, we are piloting changes to the second-language evaluation process and looking at an employee referral program. Other departments are also doing innovative work. The talent cloud pilot project and the free agents program are two examples.

Although we recognize that we need to continue to improve our recruitment and hiring practices, I should note that an impressive number of people from all parts of the country, from all walks of life and with a wide range of educational profiles, experience and skills, including language capacity, apply to our various recruitment programs every year.

In fact, last year, 325,000 unique applicants demonstrated their interest in the public service. Almost 16,000 applied through our post-secondary recruitment program. When it comes to students, 47,000 applied and nearly 13,000 were hired. The number of students hired has increased in each of the past five years.

[*Translation*]

I know we will have additional opportunities for ongoing conversations about progress on changing the staffing culture and building the tools needed to modernize staffing.

We expect that Statistics Canada will release the results of our Staffing and Non-partisanship Survey in the coming weeks. These results will be used to further identify staffing trends and inform improvements to staffing policies and practices. Our 2017-2018 Annual Report to Parliament will be tabled later this fall, as will our Departmental Results Report. Both these reports will be referred to you for examination.

[*English*]

By simplifying staffing, we will support efforts to improve diversity and inclusion within the public service. We're on the right track. We've improved the policy framework and we are modernizing our tools. Ultimately, these will work together to help change the culture, which in many ways is still risk-averse and focused on short-term needs. It places too much emphasis on internal staffing rather than recruiting the best talent from wherever it may be, and it may come from across the country.

[*Translation*]

Rest assured that the Public Service Commission maintains a strong oversight role, including our audit and investigative functions, which are important in safeguarding merit and non-partisanship.

Thank you once again for your interest in public service hiring. We would be pleased to provide further information and answer your questions.

[*English*]

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Borbey.

Mr. Trottier, you have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Carl Trottier (Assistant Deputy Minister, Governance, Planning and Policy Sector, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you very much for inviting me here today to provide members of the committee with an update on recruitment initiatives.

As stated in the clerk's most recent report, "When done right, recruitment can act as an accelerant to bring about change." This is why excelling at recruitment is such an important focus as we continue to improve our recruitment, development and retention practices.

As touched upon by my colleague, recruitment is a shared responsibility among deputy ministers, the Public Service Commission, and the office of the chief human resources officer.

[*Translation*]

The efforts mentioned by Mr. Borbey, as well as those undertaken by the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, are key to addressing demographic changes, planning for the future of work, changes to the nature of work and the workplace, and building and maintaining the capacity to meet the expectations of Canadian citizens.

The Public Service of Canada is strongly committed to recruiting, developing and retaining a high performing workforce that can deliver on the government's current and future priorities.

[*English*]

The approach we have taken to people management and recruitment includes reviewing and testing new and innovative ways to attract top talent for a high-performing public service that supports and strengthens diversity and inclusion and explores new ways to serve all Canadians. Greater diversity and inclusion have been linked to better results for organizations, including higher productivity, lower turnover, better decision-making informed by diverse perspectives, and enhanced overall performance and results.

Canada's demographic landscape is changing. There are currently nine million youth across the country, representing approximately one quarter of the population. The indigenous population is projected to grow at twice the rate of the general population.

Immigration accounts for two-thirds of Canada's current population. According to the 2016 census, if current population trends continue, the representation of visible minorities in Canadian society is projected to grow from 31.2% to 35.9% in the next two decades.

The public service must keep pace with these changes.

● (1615)

[*Translation*]

Budget 2018 proposed the creation of the Public Service Centre on Diversity, Inclusion and Wellness to support departments and agencies in creating safe, healthy, diverse and inclusive workplaces.

The Treasury Board Secretariat has been collaborating with key partners, and is developing a diversity and inclusion strategy as well as a multi-year action plan, including targeted recruitment efforts, that will serve the public service to increase diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

[*English*]

Overall, the public service is representative in each of the four employment equity designated groups as of March 31, 2016. We are proud that this overall representation has been sustained for the past four years, but we observe that gaps persist in certain occupational groups and levels in some departments and agencies, and efforts continue to address these.

An important part of improving diversity and inclusion in the public service includes exploring efforts and ideas that target recruitment and eliminate barriers in areas where we know that representation gaps continue to exist, such as women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields; visible minorities in scientific and professional groups; as well as indigenous persons in executive ranks.

Through targeted recruitment, we will also be able to attract other segments of the Canadian population, including youth and LGBTQ2+, among others.

I am very proud of the success of the federal student employment programs.

[*Translation*]

These programs provide students with meaningful work experience, exposure to a wide range of jobs and future opportunities in the federal government.

They also allow managers to identify potential recruits with diverse backgrounds and skill sets, who can be later hired as full-time public servants.

[*English*]

I want to highlight two targeted recruitment initiatives that are already under way.

First, the indigenous summer employment opportunity, now in its third year, is designed to create a positive working experience for indigenous students across Canada. It was first launched as a pilot, and allowed 33 students to come to the national capital region for a summer work term. More recently, the Public Service Commission expanded this program nationally, and 180 students were hired this year across Canada.

Second, the youth accessibility summer employment opportunity is a recruitment, onboarding, and engagement initiative originally piloted in 2017. This initiative was designed to create a positive and inclusive work experience for post-secondary students with disabilities, and created greater awareness in participating organizations about the opportunities and supports available to employees with disabilities.

The initiative used various approaches to recruitment, with an enhanced onboarding process with the goal of providing support to the hiring manager to better integrate young employees with disabilities within the public service.

In the first year, departments hired 19 students. This was expanded to 61 this year.

[*Translation*]

We will build on our efforts to expand our learning from these experiences, and apply the best practices to other targeted recruitment efforts and segments, including youth and mid-career professionals.

Our focus remains on ensuring that we have the right people in the right jobs at the right time, and that we are innovative in our approaches to attract talent of all ages.

[*English*]

There will also be times when we will need to target specific technical experience that is best suited to mid-career-level candidates. We have mechanisms in place to bring in this talent through the interchange Canada program, Canada's free agents program, and the PCO fellowship program.

These and other innovative recruitment initiatives help fast-track the ability to bring in or mobilize new talent as we work in partnership with departments and the Public Service Commission to increase talent access.

Once new employees are recruited, it is also imperative to ensure that effective support tools and practices are in place to support onboarding and capacity for new recruits, including talent management, learning plans and the development of career management tools.

I want to close by saying that we are constantly working to improve and find new ways to engage and recruit talent. Further work is needed with respect to engagement of stakeholders outside the government, such as community organizations, professional associations, universities, colleges, technical schools and private sector leaders in talent acquisition.

Thank you for your time.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think you are all aware of the drill that we go through with questions here at committees.

We'll start with seven-minute rounds, starting with the government side.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome again to the committee, Mr. Borbey.

I also welcome you, Ms. Gaudreau, Mr. Trottier and Mr. Morin.

Of course, the figure that stands out is the 197-day figure. That is the time that is required to hire a new employee from the day on which the position is published on GCJobs.

Does that include the part of the process that begins before the position is advertised? For instance, a director general may need more employees or human resources in order to reach an objective. What happens before that 197-day period? We know that the process can be longer than that.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Once the decision to staff a position has been made, and once it has been posted publicly, it takes an average of 197 days to hire a new employee. Prior planning of human resources remains necessary to ensure that the available resources are taken into consideration and that the manager choses the right staffing tool. All of that work must be done upstream. You are correct to say that the process is more complex than what we measure.

We chose to establish that starting point and that end point for our calculations. Afterwards, we will need to establish a baseline. Finally, we will see what improvements need to be made to the process in order to shorten some steps.

A lot of people are participating in the process, at each step. The hiring manager has a role to play. Human resource professionals provide advice. There is also the Public Service Commission. There are others involved, like the people who are responsible for security in the departments. So there are a lot of stakeholders. Aligning all of these stakeholders to work together on a strategy to rationalize the process represents quite an effort.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Do you act as the central agency to align the different criteria and the different agencies?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We are responsible to Parliament for the quality of the Canadian public service staffing system. Even though it is a delegated system, and there are a lot of players, we chose to assume the role of lead agency. We must exercise a direct influence, and, in certain cases, an indirect influence.

I spoke about a change of culture. We also most convince the managers that when there is an emergency, they must not completely set aside the staffing process, and come back to it two or three weeks later, when candidates are waiting for the next step.

We are going to have to impose a certain discipline, but above all we have to establish a partnership.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I am sure that everyone around the table here has heard horror stories. For instance, it has happened that people were called back two or three years later. They said thank you, but declined the offer since they had found other jobs. That may be an extreme case, but the fact remains that there is a problem.

We have already discussed this in other committees. If we want to attract people of my generation, and children of the millennium, we have to be a lot quicker, especially since we are competing with Google, which can offer jobs on the spot to people who go to job fairs.

Are there any pilot projects in universities or elsewhere?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes.

You are correct, but we must not forget the figure I gave earlier: 325,000 people applied for jobs in the public service. There are some 50,000 external appointments to the public service. There will always be a lack of balance in that way, but it means that we have a lot of choice, and quality candidates, which is good.

We set up an initiative with the University of Montreal, in Quebec. This shows that we can do things differently, and have instant staffing, so to speak, somewhat like Google.

Ms. Gaudreau, would you like to tell us more about it?

● (1625)

Ms. Véronique Gaudreau (Director General, Central Programs and Regional Offices, Public Service Commission): Yes, certainly. Thank you for the opportunity to add some details.

In March 2018, in co-operation with the University of Montreal and six departments, we organized a speed staffing event at the University of Montreal. We had chosen 56 positions to be staffed. Some of these positions were temporary, others were indeterminate, and others were linked to the cooperative education program. These positions were advertised in advance. We took the time to simplify the language, so that there would be no complications on that side, and so that the type of jobs we were offering would be clear to students and new graduates.

Three hundred people took part in that event. There were 67 on-site interviews. There was a whole system to coordinate and plan the event. We determined which people had the necessary skills for a given position. There was an on-site interview with a manager. When the manager indicated he had chosen a given candidate, we fingerprinted him or her and filled out the necessary security forms. At the end of this process, the candidate received a job offer on the spot. Of course, that offer was conditional on the result of the security investigation and language requirements, but the candidate knew that he had gotten a job. We received a multitude of positive comments and this event was a success. It was a pilot project.

You need a lot of partnerships. Currently, such programs allow us to go from transactions to relationships. We need such partnerships to understand to upstream needs, so that things can be aligned properly and candidates can be matched with positions according to their qualifications. People were surprised because in 35 minutes they received a conditional job offer.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Do you measure the retention rate?

Ms. Véronique Gaudreau: There were 32 conditional job offers.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Currently, are you measuring the retention rate per age category? We are told that millennials want to change jobs often. How can we create a culture within the Government of Canada to ensure that they can go from one department to another?

[*English*]

The Chair: Answer in about 30 seconds, if you can.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I don't have an answer on the retention rate.

[*Translation*]

I have to say that the mobility issue is very interesting. We will, in fact, be addressing it in our next annual report. There is indeed a great deal of mobility potential within the Government of Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McCauley, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Borbey, welcome back again.

In a previous meeting with us, you discussed some of the issues attracting younger applicants to the public service, whether millennials or those who are younger. Can you briefly talk about some of your recruitment methods for that? I can't imagine we're doing a one-size-fits-all.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: No, but certainly our post-secondary recruitment campaign does very much target millennials, although there are also university graduates who are not millennials, so we don't discriminate.

Our student programs are targeting millennials, essentially, and those programs are growing. I was looking at the numbers. Of the indeterminate hires in the last year, almost 55% were under 35. These numbers are going to be released with our annual report.

we're making some progress, and this has been steadily improving over the last number of years.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do you get a sense that 55% is replacing people who have retired, or is that just replacing churn?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: This is 55% of the people we've hired externally into indeterminate positions.

Just to give you a sense, when it comes to students, 97% fall into the definition of millennials, but as I've said before, I think we're still significantly under-represented in terms of the millennial population, with those being 21% or 22% of our labour force compared about 34% in the broader labour force, so we have a lot of work to do.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes. That could very well be just the length of service of public servants as well, and there just aren't the openings available.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes. Obviously we have a lot of people who are at the tail ends of their careers, people like me, at that age spectrum—I'll pick on myself—so it takes a little bit of time to turn that ship around.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Speaking on behalf of the middle-aged, hang in there.

In The Globe and Mail, there was an update on one of their old articles about nepotism in the public service, and it talks about nepotism in the standard term that we're used to, but also about job postings being tailored with specific people in mind. Could you address that?

It's funny, because I came across a great old Dilbert cartoon in which Alice, if anyone's familiar with Alice, talks about internal job postings. She sees a job she'd love and she says, "Experience required: a candidate must be a guy named Eric, pot-bellied, nearsighted, must drive a red Ford Bronco", and Dilbert says, "Well, they might have someone in mind already."

There was a report that came out before your time, before most of our time, about the nepotism issue, and I wonder if you could address how we're dealing with that ongoing issue of how job postings are getting tailored with someone specific in mind and are not making it to the general public, either to new people coming in or perhaps to people from other departments.

● (1630)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: There are a couple of points there.

First, I think we're too internally focused as a public service, and I talked about this before. I'd like to see a little bit more balance, balance between providing opportunities for existing employees to continue to grow in their careers and bringing in new talent, and I don't think we're there. We have some work to do.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How are we going to address that?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I think it's a cultural shift. It's a matter of making sure that when we are developing our inventories and programs, we're providing some value added so that people will make the choice to go into a post-secondary recruitment inventory rather than start an internal process. It's going to take some time.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I just want to interrupt you. I've got an example here, an excerpt from an exam question from a competition that included external applicants. The candidate applying was told they had failed because they did not accurately answer with regard to the term "business line client".

Now the term—the HR person admitted—was internal language not available to outside people. The question was, "You're meeting with the business line client who does not understand the role of national communication services."

Here we have the government purposely setting it up to block outside applicants. What are we doing to stop this practice of discriminating against Canadians, taxpaying Canadians, who have every right to apply for a job, but the government is blocking them?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Again, I wouldn't jump to the conclusion that there's discrimination. I think we are used to our jargon, and we have to be aware, when we set posters like this, that we're being exclusive and that we're not being accessible to all Canadians.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Everyone's doing a great job of having the public service reflect the demographics. This government, the previous government and the government before have done a great job of doing that.

How are we failing on something so basic as this?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, basically, plain language, having job posters that align with jobs that exist elsewhere in the private sector outside of government.... I talked about the system that we're working on. That will eliminate a lot of this, because we will align the way we describe positions that are made available in ways that people can understand. That's part of the challenge.

I do want to talk about nepotism, though, because that is certainly something that we are on the lookout for at the commission. We will investigate if there are allegations or if there is evidence of nepotism in a selection process, whether people have colluded—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Blaikie's father was.... No.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): He went through a 65-day job interview.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I think we also have to distinguish the fact that in some cases, through succession planning and through talent management, managers can identify that when a position becomes vacant, the best person on their team, the person most qualified, is Joe or Sally. Why launch a complex process that is seen as a bit of a sham, if at the end of the day that's the person who, with all of the right justifications, is qualified. That still meets merit. That is not nepotism, to my mind.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Have we set goals for a balance of hiring externally?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: No, we haven't.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Should we?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Some jurisdictions have done so. I've talked about this openly before. Australia and New Zealand have a policy that 100% of the jobs have to be posted outside for their governments. The U.K. is moving, and by 2020 they'll be at 100% as well. They're currently at—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do you have the power or authority to effect this proper change?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: No, I don't, but I can certainly implement it. I would be glad to do so.

Again, when I talk about this, people say, "Well, what do you have against existing internal candidates?" When we say it's open to the outside, we don't say it's closed to people inside. It means it's open to everyone.

Inside candidates will continue to have an advantage because they know the system and have worked in the organization, but let's level the playing field a little bit more by giving more opportunities for non-public servants to apply.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Blaikie, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much.

One of the things I'm curious about is the relationship between the manager who has a staffing need and the HR department or your organization. What's the extent of the involvement by somebody from outside of the immediate work area, where the demands are known and there's the sense of the team, versus somebody who does have professional skills and knowledge about a hire but not necessarily knowledge of the work context, for lack of a better term?

● (1635)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Well, most of the staffing in government is done through the delegated model by individual hiring managers located in departments and agencies that are exercising delegated authority, delegated from their deputy minister under the conditions that we set. Of course, we do monitoring and surveillance to make sure that those delegations are being exercised properly.

We have more of a central agency role in terms of surveillance of the overall system, but we also intervene because we are the front door—or front window, I guess—when people are coming in from the outside to apply to jobs in the federal government. We can influence that way as well, again, through programs and initiatives such as were described earlier, and through post-secondary recruitment, where we provide a service to the whole of government.

We create inventories, but at the end of the day, we cannot force managers to use the inventories. We can influence. In some cases, through surveillance, we might force some corrections or course corrections with departments, but at the end of the day, it's a very delegated model.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: How long typically can somebody sit in an inventory before being contacted to apply for a job?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: It's a good question. We do establish these inventories, but unfortunately we don't have enough touch points of communication with candidates. We should be having regular feedback. In fact, in some cases, we can set that up without necessarily having individuals make a call. An example would be sending an email to all students to ask them to please update their profile on our student website and to please indicate if they're still interested in student employment.

Little things like that nudge people. It helps, because then the inventory is fresher for managers who make the calls when we refer candidates. If we refer 10 people and they get 10 responses of "I'm not interested," "I've changed my phone number," or "I'm working for Google. Thank you, I'm not interested," that frustrates managers. If, however, they get eight out of 10 who are interested in an interview and potentially in being considered, then that makes for an inventory that people will use a lot more.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If government did move towards a system under which they were posting 100% or a significant portion of their job asks externally, what kind of an effect do you think that would have for your inventories? Presumably they would see more action.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's an excellent question. If that were the case, we would need to make sure that our systems were modern, efficient, and able to deal with the volume. That includes things such as using the most modern assessment tools possible to be able to get the number of candidates down to a number that's manageable for a manager. A manager may say, "I have two positions and I want to interview about 30 people." If the floodgates open and there are 1,000 applications, we have a responsibility to make sure that the system is refined enough to allow them to bring it down to the candidates who are most promising, including using testing methodology to actually bring it down to a number that's manageable. We recognize that we can't go 100% external without having modern tools.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Do the needs of the public service make it relatively easy to acquire off-the-shelf technology for that kind of parsing down, or is it highly customized technology that you need in order to do that?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's the process we're in right now. We have defined the user requirements. I described them in my opening remarks. We know what user needs are out there. We are now going to look at scoping and defining this project.

Our next step would be to go to an RFI to see what exists, wherever it may be, that may be able to meet some but probably not all of our requirements—we know that. After that, we would look at whether we could possibly, again, do more user testing based on what we get back in terms of feedback, again, proceeding iteratively and making sure that every step of the way we're testing it against the needs of the public service.

Of course there are some principles and some needs, such as official languages and accessibility, that are non-negotiable when it comes to implementing any new change, any system, to the platform. The GC Jobs platform that people use right now we see as significantly changing in the future, but we're going to do it iteratively. We're also going to be cautious in order to avoid some of the mistakes of the past in terms of big systems.

● (1640)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: As it changes, how much capacity is there to do that work in-house, or is it really something that you need to contract out in order to get it done?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We have a project management team we've created. We had a team that did the user-requirement definition. It worked for over a year on that. Now we've morphed that into a project management team. It's a small team, but we're working closely with colleagues at the Treasury Board Secretariat, the OCHRO. We also will be working with Public Services and Procurement Canada when it comes to looking at what procurement options there may be, but I suspect we will need some outside help for sure.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Within that collaboration, are the lines of accountability pretty clear that this is a Public Service Commission project led by you, and the other departments are there to assist, but ultimately—

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes. Our role is clear, but we also have built in accountability around the project, which includes a steering committee composed of assistant deputy minister-level colleagues from across the government.

I should say, by the way, that we are funded for this by contributions that departments provide to us to maintain that GC Jobs platform. We're accountable to them because they have skin in the game and they have a role to play in governance.

We also have built in, with our audit committee, an audit methodology throughout the project so that we have internal advice from our audit committee along the way if we run into some issues. We've secured the services of an independent adviser, who will be advising us along the way. Gartner is going to be working with us. We've tried to build in all of those mechanisms along the way to ensure the project is successful.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Mendès, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of you for your presence.

I am fascinated by everything that is going on at the Public Service Commission, which you described.

I'd like to ask you a question about participation. What role have the unions played in all of this process? I think that is extremely important.

To follow up on what Mr. Blaikie was saying, in this whole review of the system to implant a new way of doing things, have you asked the unions to cooperate with you? According to recent developments in other large systems, it seems important to involve them in whatever is going on.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about that, if possible.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes. Thank you for your question.

I must tell you that at the Public Service Commission, we have for a long time had a collaborative forum with the unions that is called the Public Service Commission Joint Advisory Council, or PSCJAC. Until recently, it was co-chaired by Chris Aylward himself. We submit all of these ideas and initiatives to this joint committee. We answer members' questions and we adjust our strategies according to their comments. The council meets three or four times a year. As I was saying, we submit all of the initiatives and pilot projects to this committee.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Very well. I find this reassuring, because that is an extremely important part of the entire transformation of hiring and the management of human resources you want to effect in the public service.

Let's go back to the average of 197 days. We know that some processes take much longer. If the system is delegated as you said, and if you transfer the authority to the deputy minister, or a manager or director, why does it take so long? If the delegation is done properly, why is the process so long?

Normally, the purpose of delegating powers or functions is precisely to accelerate a process. Why does this take so long?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: There are probably a lot of factors involved.

[*English*]

Michael, do you want to talk a little about some of the factors behind that 197?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Why is the delay so long?

Mr. Michael Morin (Acting Director General, Policy and Strategic Directions, Public Service Commission): A number of factors go into a staffing process. Patrick mentioned the planning, but as well we have a number of complex positions for which we need to look at appropriate assessments to ensure merit is met. A number of processes are related to ensuring that persons with priority entitlement are fully considered. There are second-language evaluations to ensure that those individuals who are required to be in a bilingual position are fully qualified. There's also security, and, as Patrick mentioned, in some cases there are a large number of candidates, and we need to ensure that we fully assess those candidates and give them due consideration.

There's not a single reason that it takes 197 days. It's a number of factors together. That's why we're looking at how we can improve in a number of those areas.

● (1645)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: If you go to what you call the "Amazon style"—one click and apply, we hope—how would that be possible, considering all that you've been explaining to us? How would you bring down the complexity of hiring people in the public service to an Amazon-like one-click apply?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: This is where all these user consultations were so valuable, because people told us what they would be looking at in a system that they would actively use. For example, a manager could go on the system and create a new job rather than spend weeks doing the job description and creating it. If a system can create it based on a common language construct so that you're not inventing terminology to describe what the person will be doing but just pull it out of the system and say you need somebody who's going to be a system administrator; we can pull that together very quickly. You have a job description, and you can have a poster that's generated very quickly as a result. You identify your key requirements—not 22, maybe five—because each one of them has to be assessed under our law. That way we could drive a lot of efficiency in the system.

We also have a feature so that we would allow the *administrateur général*, the deputy minister, to monitor the time it takes at each step of the process, because we lose track. Therefore, if a manager has designed a poster and is sitting on it and not sending it out or has received the application and has not started the first level of screening, that would show up in performance in the system. You could design it in such a way that you could track those situations and have a nudge automatically sent to that manager to ask if they know they have 20 candidates waiting to hear back from them. The technology is there.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: This would be monitored by the Public Service Commission?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We would be monitoring it from a distance, but we want deputy ministers themselves to have full information and—

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Yes, but the little nudge would be from the system administered by you.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: You could design it in such a way in the system that it's automatically a nudge after 10 days of inactivity, or something of that nature.

It's the same thing for the applicant. When the applicant sees the poster, and would fill out these fields that are very easy to fill out, rather than long letters justifying how they met each criterion, they would get immediate feedback on the percentage of match between their profile and what the manager is looking at. They could even get a nudge after saying they meet 70% of the requirements to tell them that three other positions in the system currently correspond to their profile, and would they like to be considered? That's the one click, because the profile would already be in the system and they could be considered for another position.

The technology exists to be able to do this. That's the vision we've developed through our years of testing.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: What stage have you reached in all of this?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We have finished determining the needs of users. We are now at the phase we call "defining the scope". Next month, we want to go to the market with what we call a "request for information". We will see what feedback we get from the industry.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: How many pages will...

[*English*]

The Chair: I think we're out of time on that, but we will have ample opportunity for more questions.

We'll now go to a five-minute round, starting with Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Morin, you talked about the 197-day hiring, and you mentioned a couple of things, language and security. Do you have the numbers broken out across the country? I assume in perhaps Alberta and Saskatchewan, when we're not looking at dual-language requirements, it's a shorter period, or are those replaced by other problems? What is the number of days the hire takes, just quickly, because I want to get on to other items?

Mr. Michael Morin: No, I don't have that information now, but it is something that we could—

● (1650)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Anecdotally, do you have it?

Mr. Michael Morin: I don't have it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

I want to get back to the issue of the difficulty of outsiders trying to get into the public service. I've chatted with some people on the issue and I understand that locally, if you're applying for a government job, career counsellors help you set up your resumé differently than in the public service, and they train you differently on how to apply for public service jobs. I wonder if the unique requirements of a public service application are being properly communicated to outsiders when they are applying, or if they're getting the exact same application or job posting as an internal person, who obviously has the advantage.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: One of the functions that falls under Véronique's responsibility is our outreach. We have literally hundreds of outreach events every year at universities, colleges, even high schools and job fairs. We go to visit indigenous communities and second-language minority communities and we actually spend time with people to help them understand how to apply and what's available—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: This is one of my great worries. If the average Canadian with a university degree doesn't know about such things as "business line clients", when we're dealing with aboriginal applicants and English or French as a second language, I can only imagine how difficult it is for them. I want to get a really strong understanding that in the public service—it sounds like you don't have the legislative ability to change this—we are tackling that issue of people who are not in the public service being excluded from jobs.

When you were here the last time, we talked about the name-blind recruitment project and table 7 in it. You haven't got it in front of you. We talked about how we have the name-blinding so that we're screening out for race, etc., but those in the public service still enjoyed a massive advantage in screening over those applying from the outside. Even with name-blinding, people currently in the public service have a massive advantage. It is excluding Canadians from applying. I just want to get a good sense that this is a big issue, if it is big enough that outside private sector counsellors are training people on it. I want to ensure that the public service is going to tackle this issue.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I think we were just saying the obvious: that if you're already in an organization, whether it's the public service or otherwise, you already have a certain advantage: You know the organization and the culture. That does give you an edge when it comes to competitive processes.

If we move forward as we were talking about in terms of new technology, we can take a lot of that out of the process so that when people are applying, they will be applying to a job that requires good writing skills, not one that requires you to know how to write a briefing note for a minister. Writing skills will be the primary thing that we will be assessing, rather than necessarily making a link to.... For somebody who is going for a promotion for a higher-level job, maybe knowing how to write for ministers might be very important, but for most entry-level or basic-level—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's the majority. That's what we're concerned with.

You've mentioned a lot of great things that you're working on. How long will it take, from the second you walk out this door, to perhaps get to a much better state, where you're satisfied regarding attracting outsiders and treating them—to be honest—fairly?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I think it's going to be a continuous improvement process. I've talked about some plans that we have right now. These are plans that could see a new technology being rolled out within the next two years. We have to see what is going to be available, and we're going to go at this stepwise—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is there, perhaps, an ability to report back to us in six months with new numbers, and then a year from now with some more new ones?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I am happy to report on it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Fantastic. Will it be measurable within six months and one year?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes. Again, I think our annual report that will come out within the next few weeks will actually demonstrate some progress that we've made already in some areas.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Peterson, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being with us once again.

Mr. Borbey, when we were talking about the length of time between first application and being hired, we're looking at a 197-day average. How much of that length of time might be attributed to the number of applicants and the workload that would be on the manager or the HR person who's responsible for that? Would that be a large portion?

● (1655)

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's a great question. If the manager receives, after the competition poster closes—let's say it was open for three weeks—a report from the HR professional that says, "Good news—you had 350 people apply for your poster", well, bad news—you had 350 people apply.

There's a screening process that has to kick in. Again, if the planning has been done in advance and the screening tools are clear, then that can immediately start. However, a manager may say that they never expected this and that they're not sure how they're going to get down to the 30 or 40 they want to evaluate. They may call us and ask us if they can have a cognitive test, for example, applied to the 350 applicants. We would set that up. It has to be scheduled. Right now, a lot of our testing is done in situ. That's why we want to go towards Internet-based testing, which can accelerate the process as well. That all of a sudden adds some time to the process that maybe that manager hadn't thought about originally.

That's how things go from *les voeux pieux*, you know. You want to make this happen as quickly as possible, and all of a sudden it's added 30 days to the process.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: First of all, what obligation is owed to these 350 applicants? Do they all have to be fairly assessed? Are the tools available to do that expeditiously? Maybe they're not, and maybe that's part of the problem.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: You're absolutely right. We owe it to Canadians. All applicants have to be treated fairly, with respect and transparency.

That's probably one of the reasons we end up with a lot of delays, because there is this concern about making sure we don't make any mistakes along the way and that everybody has been properly assessed. I suspect that outside of government the screening process may be much faster because there's less concern about that.

Of course, people have access to recourse if they feel that they haven't been treated fairly as well.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Right.

Based on all this—and this is just my assessment based on an hour today—I think it's maybe fair to conclude that although 197 days is probably too long, we shouldn't be using private sector jobs as a comparator, based on some of these inherent obstacles in the system.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I think if you're looking for a nuclear safety expert, having the best person for the job trumps having that person within 90 days or 120 days. We have to keep that in mind as well.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: It's obviously always a bit of a balancing act.

Is there an ideal target number in mind? I mean, you don't want to get into the situation of offering jobs that people are not taking because it's taking so long. Then you have to start all over.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We've taken the modest approach, because of what I described earlier about this being a diffused responsibility, that we will immediately try to find a 10% improvement. That's our first objective. It's a starting point.

We've already shaved a couple of days off in the priority system, the process that we used to use for.... We've already found a couple of days there. We are testing a new approach to a second language evaluation that could significantly reduce the number of days. Quite often, there's a 30-day or 40-day waiting period associated with scheduling a language test. We're already making some movement in that area.

I think 10% is easily achievable, but we have to go way beyond that.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: I have a question for Mr. Trottier, if I have a minute.

Maybe you can elaborate a little bit—as generally as you want—on the interplay between Treasury Board, the public service and even the CHRO. Does that lengthen the process too? Are people worried about stepping on each other's toes? How does this whole dynamic play out?

The Chair: If you can elaborate in less than 45 seconds, I'd truly appreciate it.

Mr. Carl Trottier: I think that Mr. Borbey has explained very well that the PSC is responsible for the staffing policy and oversees the working policy.

We like working with departments to see where the gaps are and how we can help departments look at how to better fill those gaps, be it women in scientific roles, indigenous people, or persons with disabilities.

That's the focus we're taking, but from the recruitment perspective primarily, it's the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: All those are being measured, I take it; I think we've seen a report on some of the metrics on those.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. McCauley once again, for five minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I want to switch tracks a bit.

I want to get to the hiring of veterans. I have a whole bunch of articles here that I'm going to refer to, but what's your level of satisfaction on the job we're doing on hiring veterans, either medically discharged veterans or other veterans?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I'm not satisfied.

We have placed, I believe, over 525 veterans since the new requirements came into effect in 2015. Again, I'm focusing primarily on those who were medically discharged for reasons attributable to service or not attributable to service. Those are the numbers I'm using. We also have mobility rights for veterans as well.

Again, there are various benefits that are available to veterans in the public service.

● (1700)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I appreciate what you're doing, but can I ask what we're going to ramp up? I'll read off the headlines. These are all from the last few weeks: "Over 400 disabled [vets] waiting on priority list for public-service jobs"; "Disabled [vets] finding doors shut to jobs in federal civil service"; and an interesting one, "Liberal senator raises concerns federal jobs for injured military personnel [are] going to senior staff", but not to line staff—

Mr. Patrick Borbey: I addressed this with the senator—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Last, we have "Failure to hire more veterans causing anger". It's not a one-off thing. It's quite a large issue.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: These are not recent issues, and we've addressed those issues. I'm prepared to share the material that I shared with the senator, because that was actually hearsay. So—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sure, if you could, but on the rest of the issues, what are we doing concretely to solve this?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Please, let me get to it, because I was going to say that we have, on a monthly basis, about the same number of new vets who are being added to the priority system as we're able to place. We're doing a good job of placing. We're placing on average 20 to 30 per month, but we're also getting new people joining.

What we have done is that we've set up almost what we could call a "concierge service" to support them, because we realized that there was too much of a passive approach to managing the priority. We've actually had somebody call every veteran who was on the list to find out if they actually were actively searching for work or if they were not. In some cases—very many cases—they were not ready. They could not at that point consider jobs in the public service. Even if we referred them to jobs, they were not responding or they were not able.

That's the first triage we've done. Now we're focusing on making sure that for those who are ready to work, and who are able to work, we place them as soon as possible.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: For the ones on the wait-list, is that just because they might be on a wait-list in, for the sake of argument, Regina, Saskatchewan, and there's not an opening there? Is it language? Are there specific obstacles?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: There are issues of a mismatch between the way they sometimes describe their experience and the skills they've acquired in the military. There's not a direct link to the NOC, to what we call the occupational codes, so that's something to help bridge in order to help veterans describe what skills they bring and match them with what we need in the public service.

I agree with you. There's an issue of mismatch for regional jobs. We had a whole effort at the Invictus Games. We had a number of departments there with jobs ready to offer, but at the end of the day we were not successful in placing anyone because there was a mismatch between where people wanted to work and the jobs that were available. For every initiative like this, we learn as a result and we try to adjust our approach.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Are you able to communicate directly with them, or are you going at it in a roundabout way such that it has to go through Veterans Affairs?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: No. We have the mandate to communicate directly with them.

We now have two veterans on staff. Primarily, one of them makes all those calls, because sometimes the calls are a little bit difficult. This is a veteran calling a fellow veteran to try to see how we can accelerate their integration into the public service.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How are we communicating to those who are leaving the service that we have this available for them? Again, do you have access the second they're out of the service, or does that have to come through someone else?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, there's a process with National Defence. We're working closely with National Defence and Veterans Affairs in terms of preparing people for moving at the right time to kick in that entitlement, because that entitlement has a time limit.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is it five years?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: It's five years, but again, if for the first two years of that entitlement that person is not even able to contemplate work, then we also advise them to be careful and—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is five years enough? Do we need to extend that to better serve those veterans?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That's the legislative provision that we're managing.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: In your opinion, would it help these veterans?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We have not run into issues related to the five years at this point, because it's relatively new. I don't have any indication that it's a problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Jowhari, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to go back to you, Mr. Borbey. I'm going to ask the question that everybody else has asked, but with a slightly different approach.

You've mentioned that from the time you post to the time someone is hired, it takes about 197 days. I know that some of my colleagues have made an attempt to try to figure out this process. What are the key elements of the process that are taking the longest?

With my background as a former engineer, especially in the industrial engineering field, I'm familiar with the processes. When you look at the process and length of time, you try to break that into subprocesses. You see which ones you could alternate, which ones you could parallel, and which ones could be reduced in time.

If I were to ask you to name the three top subprocesses within the hiring and onboarding and which processes are consuming the most time within the 197 days, what would you say those would be?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Michael, do you want to answer that?

● (1705)

Mr. Michael Morin: I would say it was the development of assessment material, and then the scheduling of the assessments—for instance, getting a large number of candidates for interviews.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Wouldn't the development of the assessment criteria be part of the planning that happens before the hiring starts?

Mr. Michael Morin: In some cases it is, and in some cases it is not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

I'm going to come to the question I'm about to ask.

Much of the recommendation that I heard is very system-focused and very technology-focused. You're hoping to be able to reduce the wait time by about 10%.

Can you help me understand how implementing this system would reduce time for defining assessment criteria, which is taking a long time right now?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Again, imagine we're thinking about what the users have told us they would want. Imagine that the manager has just gone and cut all kinds of steps because he or she was able to create and post the job through the common construct language in the system. That manager would actually be guided towards the assessment tools that are available online. Again, rather than calling their HR adviser and asking what kind of test to administer to bring this 350 down, the system would actually guide them towards existing tests. These are tests already in place that the Public Service Commission, through our Personnel Psychology Centre, keeps updating and delivering. That would immediately....

Mr. Majid Jowhari: You are going to build a repository of assessment criteria by type of job. When you post the job, by default the assessment criteria are going to be there. Okay. That cuts it.

I have another question. I know it doesn't have anything to do with hiring, but I have a reason for asking the question.

On average, how long does it take to train someone after he or she is onboarded?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: That falls more into the world of my colleague Carl.

Mr. Carl Trottier: I'm not sure I would be able to answer that. It would all depend on which job a person is hired for and the confidence of the....

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Let's say it's for an entry-level job. Just make it really simple.

Mr. Carl Trottier: Again, I won't be able to speak to the training, but what normally happens with an entry-level job is that an onboarding takes place. The onboarding is really about welcoming an individual to the workplace. This individual has been found qualified, has been hired, and is arriving. We want to make sure the technology is enabled and the systems are all up.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Would this be two weeks, three weeks, a month?

Mr. Carl Trottier: That's on day one.

Our objective on day one is to ensure an employee has the IT equipment they need. They meet their manager that day and have their job explained to them.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: You're hoping that training and onboarding won't take too long. Not weeks, but....

Mr. Carl Trottier: This would be within weeks. The onboarding is the beginning, but within weeks you want them to go through an orientation program that tells them what is what with regard to their job.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: On average, how long does an entry-level person stay in the job?

Mr. Carl Trottier: Again, I don't have that information here. I'm sorry.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Since we are investing 197 days, which I understand we are trying to shorten, I was hoping to get an idea of how long they are actually staying in this job. You said there is mobility, but if they are not staying in this job, there is another element that we really need to consider aside from the fact that it's taking us 197 days. If they are staying in the job for about four or five months—even if I assume 197 days is the elapsed time, not business days—it's going to take me 28 weeks to onboard someone. If, for whatever reason—we can probe into that in another study—they are not staying in the job for longer than four or five months—and I can share some of the stories from my experience—then we have an issue.

The Chair: I'm afraid you won't be able to share too many, because we're out of time.

Colleagues, we have a little bit of time left. I know that Madam Ratansi would like a round of questions. I'm going to cut them down to five minutes per. I'm not sure how many other questions we have, but we'll start with Madam Ratansi. If there are others when we're finished with her five minutes, we'll try to accommodate.

Go right ahead, please.

● (1710)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much. I think it was Ms. Yip who wanted to ask the question, but I will start off.

It was interesting listening to Mr. Jowhari when he was asking the questions and saying you're very system-focused and very technology-focused.

I used to do the hiring practices for the Province of Ontario. We used to look for internal auditors, and if you didn't have the right word in your application form, the system would throw it out.

How have you put into place checks and balances to ensure the good ones don't disappear on us? It's very critical. Technology is not a panacea for human eyes, although we have all looked at technology as a panacea.

Could you explain that to me?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, and I agree with you. Our vision is to ensure that the technology that we provide will be there to facilitate human decisions, not to replace human decisions. I absolutely agree with you. That's part of our design criteria.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: The comment I get from a lot of people who have applied to the public service is that they never received a response. The reason is that when the application comes, in my experience, it doesn't even come to a human. It is fed first into the system to discern whether it's an application that is even relevant to the position.

If my letter does not dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s, I think that's where.... I was listening to what Mr. McCauley was asking you, because if I did not know how the public service works, my application would be "I am this, that, blah, blah. I'd like to do blah, blah, blah," and it wouldn't match that systems analytical tool. Have you ensured that the first round of your applications are actually processed by a human being, or is it a robot?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: There's no technology that I know of that exists in the public service that does that. All applications that come externally or internally are reviewed by individuals, by people who actually sift through and sort and read the very lengthy application and determine whether that person meets that first screening.

Remember we talked about the screening process for anonymous recruitment. Those are actually individuals who are going through that application and making that decision with, in some cases, some bias, as we talked about. That's the current system as it exists. Having done it myself, I can tell you that it is extremely lengthy and extremely tiring, and it's extremely easy to say at the end of the day, "Okay, I'm going to leave this aside because my eyes can't focus anymore." That's part of what we're trying to change. Again, the complex application—to have to respond to 10 different asset criteria or even to describe the criteria—really is too complicated.

The other thing we want is to have managers, when they're interacting with potential candidates, talk more about what their potential is and less about what they've done, and have more of a conversation about what potential candidates could contribute in the future. Again, that's part of merit; it's not just what you bring today to the organization, but what you could bring in the future.

That's more complicated, and we have people in our Personnel Psychology Centre looking at ways that we could systematically assess that. It's much more complicated than just ticking a box that you can write briefing notes for ministers or whatever it may be.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That's good to hear, but my next question is this: Have you reduced the complexity of the requirements? If you're applying for an administrative position and you put in bureaucratese.... Has the bureaucratese been reduced? Do we have a comfort zone? Do you have some ways that we can check it?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, and we've tried. We've had some pilots to look at using plain language. I don't know if I talked about it at this committee, but we compared job ads that we had to standards in top-performing organizations and determined that we rated something like a point zero or a 0.5 compared to 70 or 80 or whatever on this tool that we used.

We've made some modifications. We've attempted to jazz things up a little bit, make it more attractive, talk more about the organization that people would be joining rather than warning them about meeting all these criteria.

There's still much more work to do. We still have managers who fall into the comfort of saying, "If I add five more criteria, I'm going to reduce that 350 down to a manageable level" or something like that, not understanding that they're actually complicating the process and alienating good candidates that normally should apply.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we still have a little bit of time left. If there are any questions.... It would be a Conservative question if there is one.

Mr. McCauley, you have five minutes, no more.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Have you looked at Bill C-81, which we're debating right now? It's the new persons with disability act.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, that's the accessibility act.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Have you looked at how that's going to affect us, or affect you?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes. Again, we're working with Yazmine Laroche, the deputy minister who has been appointed to lead the implementation of accessibility requirements within the public service. We're working with her on looking at various ways that the Public Service Commission can be supportive.

There are a couple of areas. There is an expectation that there will be a new internship program created that will specifically target persons with disabilities. We're looking at how we stand that up. Véronique and her team are doing the design work there and the consultation on how that's going to work.

The more interesting challenge is the commitment that has been made to hire a thousand additional persons with a disability into the government, per year, over the next five years. That's an area where we're going to have to really examine all the processes and make sure that—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do you know where the thousand came from? As I understand from the Library of Parliament report we discussed the last time you were with us, this government, the previous government, and the government before had done a very good job of meeting their goals for hiring.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: We're not.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Well, the Library of Parliament says differently. It says that the workers within the public service exceed, actually, the percentage in the—

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Let me explain. The reason we're doing well in the public service is that disabilities are acquired. We have an aging workforce, so most of the progress we've made is a result of that natural phenomenon. When it comes to hiring new recruits—we can talk about it at another time, when I release the numbers in our annual report—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We'll have to, because we don't have the time now.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: —we get much less than the normal labour availability in terms of applicants. It's either because people don't want to be part of our organization and don't see themselves as being welcomed or they are refusing to self-identify. It's a combination of those two, but our numbers are not good.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: They can't get by the outside screening if they're not already on the inside.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Exactly. If people fear they won't be getting a fair screening, we have work to do there. We shouldn't be complacent.

The other thing is that those numbers on the labour force availability don't reflect the people who want to work but who are not looking for work because they don't think they belong. If we want to be an accessible employer, we have to actually reach out beyond just opening up the processes and telling people they're welcome. We actually have to go and meet with organizations that can help us find the candidates.

In fact, I have one of my VPs in Toronto meeting with an organization with that purpose: How can we get more candidates, the candidates we never see, to apply?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I think it's fantastic that you're being proactive with this. Well done.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Thank you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: If it's a happy coincidence that we're able to clean up the case of application, it's a win for everyone.

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Are there any other questions?

Madam Yip, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Okay. I'll just get to it.

What efforts are made to ensure that the federal workforce is diversified, and what is the representation of visible minorities in the public service now?

Mr. Patrick Borbey: Maybe I can start, and Carl can jump in as well.

In all of the employment equity groups, we're actually above labour force availability in terms of the current representation in the public service. For visible minorities, for example, from our latest data, about 14.5% of our labour force self-identifies as a visible minority. That compares to 13% in the labour force availability. We know through the census that this number will be going up, so again there's no reason to be complacent here. We might in fact be behind when the next numbers come out.

I am always looking at our application rates when it comes to external processes. Whether it's for students, for post-secondary recruitment, or for general application, on average between 30% and 35% of our applicants self-identify as a visible minority. To me, that indicates that there is significant interest in joining the public service from those groups. Therefore, I'm hopeful that by having more external hiring, more external recruitment, we will continue to grow in those areas. That's with respect to visible minorities.

Carl, do you want add something on the other groups?

● (1720)

Mr. Carl Trottier: With regard to diversity and inclusion, we are currently working with the public service and other partners on a strategy for diversity and inclusion. It's in the works currently. It's based on the recommendations that came out of the joint task force, as well as other reports that were tabled recently, such as the collaboration circle for federal indigenous representation and the report on diversity and inclusion in the public service. There's also the creation of the centre on diversity from budget 2018. That's also taking place. That's the centre on diversity, inclusion and wellness that will be coming together to be able to support the efforts on diversity and inclusion.

I think, based on what Patrick said and the work that's going on, we're actually moving in a very positive direction.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

To all of our witnesses, thank you again for being here. It's been much appreciated. Should you have any additional information or should there be some questions you weren't unable to provide answers to, I would appreciate it if you could get that information directly to our clerk.

As Mr. McCauley said earlier, I'm sure we'll be talking with you again, Mr. Borbey and Mr. Trottier, sometime in the very near future.

Thank you again, ladies and gentlemen.

The meeting is adjourned.

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